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PAN 6

# NO METHODIST BISHOPS.

AN APPEAL TO THE MINISTERS AND LAYMEN  
OF THE WESLEYAN METHODIST CHURCH  
TO REJECT THE PROPOSALS OF THE  
CONFERENCE COMMITTEE TO  
IMPOSE AN EPISCOPATE UPON  
THE CONNEXION.

BY  
ROBERT W. PERKS, M.P.

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FOURTH THOUSAND.

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MY object in the following pages is to consider the extraordinary proposal to constitute a Methodist Episcopate, which has been suddenly revealed to the Methodist public, and is said to have received the unanimous sanction of a Conference Committee. The project has been welcomed with a chorus of what looks like preconcerted praise by the more conservative organ of Methodism, *The Methodist Recorder*, and also by *The Methodist Times*, which, for this purpose, may be considered to be its accomplished editor, the Rev. H. P. Hughes. The scheme also enjoys the advantage of the journalistic blessing of the Rev. Dr. Lunn in this month's *Review of the Churches*. Mr. P. W. Bunting, who is the only Methodist layman of front rank who so far has said a word in favour of the scheme, believes that as "Dr. Rigg and Mr. Price Hughes are at one about it," the plan is very likely to be adopted. There is apparently no doubt that Dr. Rigg, Dr. Stephenson, and Mr. Hughes—a talented, powerful, and respected combination—are the three chief sponsors and devisers of the new project.

On the other side an equally experienced, intelligent, and popular body of ministers are already ranged—the Rev. C. H. Kelly, head of the Methodist Book department, and an ex-President; the Rev. Charles Garrett, an ex-President, Chairman of the Liverpool District, and the sole survivor of the little band of Liberal Wesleyan ministers who founded *The Methodist Recorder*; the Rev. J. E. Clapham, head of the Home Missionary department; and the Rev. T. Champness, the organiser of the Joyful News Evangelisation work. To this list might be added a long array of the older as well as younger ministers of Methodism to whom Bishoprics have no attractions. Perhaps it is too early yet to refer to the views

of the Methodist laity. Typical and representative Wesleyans, like the Right Hon. H. H. Fowler, M.P., Sir Isaac Holden, M.P., Mr. Clough, M.P., Mr. Lidgett, Mr. Allen, M.P., Mr. Lewis Williams, of Cardiff, Mr. Alderman Holland, M.P., with some of the most prominent Conservative Methodist laymen, are equally opposed to the new experiment.

What, then, is the project which has evoked this unwonted consensus of hostile opinion? It is to withdraw from Circuit work thirteen of the ablest ministers of our Church, to endow them for six years with the functions of a quasi-episcopate, to give to them a commanding voice in the distribution of the ecclesiastical patronage of the Methodist Church, and to place under the control of each of such "separated chairmen" sixty circuits and 120 ministers.

I shall endeavour to show that Methodism has made no demand for this serious constitutional change; that our Church does not ask, because she does not need, a Bench of Bishops; that the proposal is opposed to the genius of Methodism and the spirit of the age; that the money which this strange experiment will cost may be far more usefully applied; that the new ecclesiastical order will come into conflict with Circuit and District authorities; and that a Wesleyan Prelacy will prove an insuperable barrier in the path of Methodist Reunion.

#### A CLERICAL INVENTION.

The first question one naturally puts is, "Who asks for this new Hierarchy?" Mr. Hughes, with characteristic rashness, says his opponents do not know what the term hierarchy means. Unfortunately history has taught us only too well the meaning of the word and the nature of the thing. But to satisfy Mr. Hughes, let us see what the dictionary says: "*Hierarchy*—(1) An order or rank of angels or celestial beings;" that, I admit, will not apply to the thirteen new bishops. (2) "Constitution and government of the Christian Church, or ecclesiastical polity comprehending different orders of clergy, as the hierarchy of England." This is a fair definition of the new order. I have no objection to call the

new officials for the moment "Separated Chairmen," and again to inquire, "Who wants them?" The new invention is, I am glad to say, the creation of the clerical and not the lay mind. Some Methodists will remember that twenty years ago the Rev. John Bond, who is a member of the Liberation Society, and therefore not, one would suppose, an enthusiast for episcopacy, propounded a scheme for separating Chairmen of Districts from Circuit work and re-arranging the Districts. Although Mr. Bond is a member of the Conference Committee appointed last July at Cardiff, it will be no injustice to him to say that the three leading advocates and framers of the present scheme are the three accomplished ministers whom I have already named, viz., Revs. Dr. Rigg, Dr. Stephenson, and H. Price Hughes.

The wisdom of our ancestors has provided a simple and effectual method whereby the Methodist Church can make known its wishes to the powers that be. Memorials are addressed to the Conference by the District Synods, by the Quarterly Meetings, or even from individual members of Society; and these memorials may come from ministers alone, or from representative bodies of ministers and laymen. Have any District Synods or any Quarterly Meetings asked for anything bearing the faintest resemblance to the new order? No, not a single one.

#### NO POPULAR DEMAND.

When laymen were admitted to the Conference, memorials were presented in large numbers from District and Quarterly Meetings in favour of this reform. So it was when the new order of sessions was devised. There was similar evidence of a popular demand for the extension of the ministerial term, and also for Methodist union; but there is no trace of any such desire for a Methodist Episcopate. I have looked through the recommendations of the District Synods for many years past, and find no suggestion emanating either from the ministerial or the representative side of the District Synods in favour of this plan, or any scheme remotely like it. Nor has any Methodist Quarterly Meeting memorialised

the Conference in favour of an episcopate. The laity of Methodism have certainly not demanded it, nor have the ministers done so. Surely the clerical advocates of this sweeping constitutional change should tell us who has. To the question, "Has the Methodist Church asked for this change?" there can be only one honest answer: "No, it has not."

Mr. Hughes and also *The Methodist Recorder* attach some importance to the alleged unanimity of the Conference Committee. Mr. Hughes indeed calls it "an astonishing and delightful omen." I will venture, therefore, in a few sentences, to inquire how and when this Committee was appointed, and in what manner it is constituted. These are important considerations when we are invited to accept its decisions almost as a divine revelation.

#### HOW THE COMMITTEE WAS OBTAINED.

Now there are three things which one must bear in mind about this Committee, totally apart from its *personnel*, all of which tend to deprive the findings of the Committee of the authority which otherwise might have attached to its decisions. The first fact is that the Committee was appointed at the very fag end of the Representative Session of Conference, when hardly twenty laymen were present; the second fact is that the main object which the promoters of this movement had in view was most carefully concealed from the Conference; and the third fact is that the Committee to whom this supremely important constitutional change was referred is a nominated, as distinguished from an elective committee. No care in the selection of its members could wipe out these stains in its appointment.

That the advocates of the Episcopate scheme had the special feature of "separated chairmen" in their minds when they went to the Cardiff Conference in July last, is clear from the statements in the respective journals.

*The Methodist Times* says that the proposals submitted by Dr. Rigg to the Committee on Thursday, the 2nd December, at the Centenary Hall, had been "long and carefully considered." *The Methodist Recorder* goes further, and



declares that the idea "has been simmering in many minds for years past." If this is so, I ask why were not the ministers and laymen told at Cardiff last July what was in the minds of the promoters of this scheme when the Committee was appointed?

Surely when the Conference is asked to appoint a committee, it is desirable that the Conference should be informed what the committee is going to consider. Some of the fiercest battles in the Conference have raged round the nomination of committees. The youngest member of the Conference knows that certain questions are settled "yea" or "nay" directly the committee is constituted. Take, for example, the question of Methodist Union. There was an era in Methodist history—and it was a dark and bad epoch—when a policy of secrecy was observed by the official administrators of our Church. A phrase then in common use, "It won't do to let our people know too much," showed the distrust then felt of the rank and file. It will be a sad day for our Church if this spirit ever again animates any section either of our clergy or laity.

Now what happened at the Cardiff Conference? On the first morning of the Representative Session Dr. Rigg gave notice of the following motion:—"That a committee be appointed to sit during the year and report to the next Conference as to the possibility—by some re-arrangement of the Districts and by any other means that may be found advisable—of providing for the greater efficiency and consistency of District administration." Dr. Rigg was doubtless well aware when he drafted this notice of motion that under cover of the words "by any other means that may be found advisable," he intended to introduce his scheme for founding a Methodist Episcopate, a project which Mr. Hughes very correctly says is "one of the most important legislative reforms ever attempted in British Methodism." Why, I again ask, was this intention not disclosed to the Conference when they were asked later on to name the Committee?

Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and nearly all Friday were allowed to go by. Numerous questions of very secondary importance to this were lengthily discussed. Lay-

men were leaving daily. The Conference was each day growing thinner in numbers. Not a word was breathed of this momentous proposal; but on Friday night, an hour or two before the Representative Session closed, Dr. Rigg brought on his motion. Even then he said nothing about the chief feature of his scheme. Was that fair to the Conference? Was it fair to the gentlemen who, many in their absence and without their consent, were put upon the Conference Committee? Above all was it fair to tens of thousands, nay millions, of Methodists with whose interests the Conference is legally charged? Very few laymen would have left Cardiff had they been told that in the dying moments of that assembly an attempt was to be made to fasten a Bench of Bishops upon their Church.

I am well aware that I shall be told that the lay representatives should remain to the close of the Conference. Theoretically they ought. Practically they don't.

#### WHAT THE CONFERENCE WAS TOLD.

As it is important to see precisely what information was given to the Conference as to the duties of the Committee, and the scope of their inquiry, I reproduce the following report of what took place from *The Methodist Recorder* :

"The ex-President (Dr. Rigg) moved the resolution of which he had given notice, and said that was a matter which had been forced upon him for a long time, but especially during the present year; but it was far too difficult and delicate and complicated a question for him to say for the first time before a full Conference or in any large meeting all he thought might be said. It was a matter that wanted the most careful and complete consideration. What he asked was that the Conference would consent to the appointment of a committee to look at it. For want of efficiency in the maintenance of the discipline of their District Synods, every part of the Connexion had suffered. How to remedy those evils was a very difficult question indeed. He thought possibly some re-arrangement of the Districts might contribute one element towards improvement; but he

did not think it would cover all the questions involved. Some Districts were too large and some too small, and some were not conveniently grouped round the centre. In very few did all the laity attend and take part through all the business in which they should take part. The discipline and the business traditions of different Districts greatly varied, and it was exceedingly important that an effective discipline should be maintained alike in all their Districts."

What layman attending the Cardiff Conference that Friday night could have supposed that under this cautious utterance there lurked a Methodist Episcopate? Indeed, Dr. Rigg's speech would lead to an entirely different conclusion. Two points—and it seems to me two only—are here foreshadowed, viz., a re-arrangement of Districts, and some enlargement of the powers of Chairmen in order to secure effective and uniform "discipline." The resolution was adopted, apparently without one word of discussion, and the committee, consisting of twenty-six ministers and twenty-six laymen, with the President, was appointed.

The following is the official entry in the Minutes of Conference (page 326):—

"District re-arrangement and administration.—

"The following Committee is appointed to meet during the year to consider and report upon the possibility of providing by some re-arrangement of Districts and by any other means that may be found advisable for the greater efficiency and consistency of District administration:—

"The Rev. H. J. Pope, President of the Conference; *David J. Waller, D.D.*, Secretary; *James H. Rigg, D.D.*, ex-President; T. Allen, J. S. Banks, J. Bond, Dr. Bowden, J. Bush, C. Garrett, *Walford Green*, Dr. Greeves, M. Hartley, *Price Hughes*, D. C. Ingram, H. Jones, J. S. Jones, F. Kellett, Charles H. Kelly, T. McCullagh, Dr. Moulton, G. W. Olver, B.A., Dr. Randles, J. S. Simon, Dr. Stephenson, W. H. Thompson, W. L. Watkinson, Dr. Young, Messrs. Moses Atkinson, T. Barnsley, J. Beckett, P. W. Bunting, M.A., J. Collingham, S. Cole, J. Cooper, J. Dyson, T. R. Fereñs, H. B. Harrison, T. M. Harvey, J. R. Hill, E. Hoyle, W. Hunt, E. Hutchinson,

W. Lanè, *W. Middlebrook*, J. Cory Monkhouse, T. G. Osborn, M.A., W. W. Pocock, W. O. Quibell, T. Richardson, G. J. Smith, W. Tunstill, *W. Vanner*, and P. F. Wood.

"The Rev. Marshall Hartley is the convener."

I have printed in italics the names of the twenty-one ministers and seven laymen who were present at the meeting on December 2nd, when Dr. Rigg's scheme was disclosed. Such were the circumstances under which the Committee was appointed.

#### A "CAREFULLY CHOSEN" COMMITTEE.

Before passing to the merits of the point at issue, I may, perhaps, be allowed just a few words as to the *personnel* of the Committee.

So far as my experience goes there are three ways in which Methodist committees are appointed by the Conference. The ordinary departmental committees nominate their own members, and these committees, after passing the scrutiny of a special nomination committee, which sits immediately before the Representative Session, are submitted to the full Conference for confirmation when the business of the department in question is under review. The second class or type of committee is that which in my judgment is entitled to the greatest respect, and whose decisions are most authoritative. These committees are, as a rule, composed of a certain number of nominated members, named by the Conference, supplemented by ministers and laymen, chosen by the District Meetings. It is manifest that by infusing into the committee a large and preponderating elective element, often chosen after lengthy debate in the District Synods, a healthier expression of public opinion is evoked. The third and the most objectionable method is that which was adopted in the present case, namely, the nomination of the committee from the Conference platform. This method of election really resolves itself, especially in a thinly attended Conference, into the appointment of the committee whose names have been furnished to the Secretary of the Conference by the promoters of the committee. If, for example, I desired to obtain a

decision from the Methodist Conference in favour of the Disestablishment of the Church of England I could easily do so if I were allowed to nominate my own committee, and bring the subject forward in a Conference when the members present were chiefly lay representatives, and few ministers were present. But a decision obtained from a committee so appointed would not be entitled to much respect. In the same way, and for the same reasons, I think it unfair to the Methodist Church that the promoters should endeavour to snap a judgment from a conference, as distinguished from a connexionally elected committee, upon a subject of such momentous import. Mr. Hughes says that the Committee was "most carefully selected." Perhaps a shorter word might more accurately have been used. It is evident, however, that a Committee nominated from the Conference platform cannot speak the mind of Methodism, nor can it command the same respect as a Committee elected by the District Synods with a full knowledge of the subject upon which their representatives will have to pronounce judgment.

If ever a committee was appointed by the Conference upon which the ordinary circuit minister should have been powerfully represented this was surely the Committee. What is in future to be the relationship between the thirteen new ecclesiastical overseers and their 1,605 subordinates? That is an important question for the circuit minister, and especially for the 798 superintendents; and yet this Committee comprises seventeen ministers holding official posts, and only nine circuit-travelling preachers. This, however, is not all. No one can read the names of the ministers forming this Committee, and call to mind their speeches in Conference, and their writings in the press and elsewhere upon ecclesiastical questions, without at once seeing that many of them, indeed a distinct majority, might be expected to welcome any development of Methodism which would bring her into more direct approximation to the organisation of the Anglican Church. It is a great mistake to imagine that men holding extreme democratic and

socialistic opinions upon humanitarian questions are possessed of the same broad views when one enters the domain of theological belief or Church polity. Mr. Hughes, for example, is an ecclesiastic down to the tips of his fingers. "We, ourselves," says Mr. Hughes, "have always been favourable to the Episcopal system," and, he adds, "the Episcopal form of church-government is one that on the whole is most favourable to an aggressive policy."

Turning for one moment to the lay-side of the Committee, I see that of the twenty-six laymen, fourteen are Conservatives, and twelve are Liberals. I do not know how far this may be an index to their views upon ecclesiastical questions, but I venture most fearlessly to assert that the Committee, on its lay side, does not with any distant approach to fairness represent the balance of Methodist lay-opinion.

I offer no apology for referring in some detail to the inception or conception of this strange scheme. I claim to have shown :

(1) That the Methodist Church has not asked for the new order of officials, and that the project emanates from a small circle of Methodist ministers not in circuit work, who hold official positions.

(2) That the promoters of the scheme did not venture to disclose their ideas to the Conference, but obtained the appointment of a committee without stating the main question which they knew the committee would be asked to consider.

(3) That the committee chosen for this work was not one elected by the District Synods, but one nominated from the Conference platform, probably by the promoters of the scheme.

I pass, however, from these preliminary points to consider the merits of the proposal to withdraw thirteen of our most efficient ministers from circuit work and set them apart for their new duties.

#### SOME ADMISSIONS.

Let me at once say that I admit that the present arrangement of Districts for Methodist Church purposes is capable of



improvement. Some are too large, some too small. Some are financially too weak, and some perhaps too powerful. Nobody would deny that the Districts might be advantageously re-arranged, and possibly, for some purposes, grouped or enlarged. Again, I willingly concede that the Chairman of a large District, whether he be the Superintendent of a circuit or the holder of an official post, has as a rule too much to do, and needs some ministerial or lay assistance. This necessity will become greater, and will consequently be practically recognised, as and when the value of the Chairman's services become more fully appreciated, and as new spheres of Church influence and work present themselves. Further, I agree with the movers of the Conference resolution, that it is desirable that the discipline of our Church should be uniformly administered, although I am not fully conscious of what this means. The Methodist ministry has always claimed to frame and administer its code of moral and ecclesiastical discipline inside its own order, and, so long as the high standard, which now and has for many years marked the clergy of Methodism, is maintained, the laity will not complain or interfere. Whether a successful attempt can be made to define the functions of Chairmen of Districts I greatly doubt ; and any proposal to regulate their relationship, even with their present limited powers, to circuits and to the ministers in their Districts, will in my judgment produce irritation, confusion, and the very antithesis of "efficiency." Had the Committee been charged with such branches of inquiry, beyond the criticism that the best electorate to choose such a committee was the District Synods and not the Conference, I do not know that anyone would have seriously complained. Most of the points are ones upon which nine Methodists out of ten would probably come ultimately to an agreement.

#### THE REAL ISSUE.

The real issue to be fought out comes when we reach the next proposition, which is that the Chairmen of the enlarged or grouped Districts should be taken out of circuit work and endowed with episcopal functions. Is Methodism to have

an episcopate or not? Do we, as a church, need bishops, or do we not? Is the creation of a new ecclesiastical order essential or even desirable? These are the real issues, and it will be unfortunate if they are obscured by such minor points as the re-arrangement of Districts or the disciplinary power of Chairmen of Synods, or if we permit ourselves to be led away either by the vehement declamation of *The Methodist Times* or the poetical similes of *The Recorder* from the plain, naked, ugly fact that the new order will be an episcopate.

This seems to me such a self-evident proposition that I do not propose to waste any time in demonstrating the fact. Every man of ordinary common sense will settle it for himself. Mr. Hughes says "there is no proposal to introduce a 'new clerical order' into Methodism or to give any of our ministers any more authority or ecclesiastical patronage than they enjoy to-day." When a leading member of the Committee talks like this, all one can do is to wonder at the vehemence of his language and the simplicity of his mind; and pass on. The truth is that Mr. Hughes finds himself committed to a very absurd and silly scheme, which his knowledge of the Methodist people should have warned him would never be sanctioned; and he is only making his position more untenable by distorting the statements of his opponents, and heaping cheap ridicule upon men on whose judgment and help he is as a rule ready to rely. Mr. Hughes finds himself in an awkward corner, and he tries to get out of it by abusing everyone who differs from him. It would be, one would think, quite time enough to say of Mr. Champness, the successful founder of the invaluable Joyful News Mission, and the conductor of its spirited journal, that "no man of business would ever talk such nonsense," when this accomplished minister proves his business incapacity, say by plunging the Joyful News Mission into debt, or when his newspaper ceases to be the conspicuous success which it is to-day. Can anything be more unfair or more wanting in taste than to say, as Mr. Hughes does, that in attacking the Methodist Bishopric scheme Mr. Champness "appeals to three motives



and three only. First, hatred of the Church of England : secondly, love for money : and thirdly, dislike of authority" ? I might as reasonably say of Mr. Hughes himself that in promoting the Bishopric scheme he is influenced by three overmastering principles—first, hatred of Dissent ; second, love of clerical power ; third, belief in his own infallibility. Mr. Hughes gloats over the title "bishop." He loves the name ; he loves the thing. He appeals to me to say whether it has "ever occurred to me that the most efficient manner of playing into the hands of the High Church party and of Roman Catholics is to give them a monopoly of the word 'bishop' ?" In response to the inquiry, I frankly say that, up to the present time, no such idea has, I am thankful to avow, entered my head. "Our real wisdom," he adds, "is to rescue and redeem Scriptural terms and offices from their priestly perversion and mediæval associations." These quotations demonstrate beyond doubt that if Mr. Hughes had his way he would unquestionably dub the thirteen "separated Chairmen," Bishop Brown, Bishop Jones, and Bishop Robinson, and so forth ; and that he would do so in the honest belief that so styling, and I presume suitably dressing them, he would be strengthening rural as well as urban Methodism, and preventing "our thoughtful and educated children" from being driven into the Church of England.

In advancing these opinions I believe Mr. Hughes to be honestly giving expression to the most pitiable and distressing delusions. The unfortunate tendency of some of the official leaders to strive to graft upon Methodism the ecclesiastical usages, titles, and ceremonial of the Anglican Church, in the belief that by so doing we are "asserting our equality," has already been the means of alienating from Methodism hundreds of thousands of adherents. Appeal to the educated and thoughtful children of our Church, whether they come from the Leys or from the humblest Wesleyan elementary school, and they will tell you that they desire to maintain in its purity the simple beauty of our early services, that they are not anxious to imitate the ornate ritual of the Roman or Anglican Church, that they desire their ministers above all to be

"preachers of the Gospel," and not sacrificing priests, and that if called upon to elect between the rigid formalism of the State Church and the irregular principles of Dissent, they will reject the former and adopt the latter.

#### THE FRUITS OF ANGLICAN EPISCOPACY.

Mr. Hughes is not alone in declaring that an episcopal form of church government is the one best adapted to a progressive Christian Church. Mr. Bunting, in the current number of *The Review of the Churches*, commits himself to the same theory. As anything that Mr. Bunting writes is always well worthy of consideration, I take the liberty of quoting his words, and I remark in passing that it is clear that he regards the new ecclesiastical order as something which in years to come future generations of Methodism will desire to clothe with even greater authority and more extensive jurisdiction than is now suggested. One of the duties in years to come may be to publicly admit new converts into the Church. A Methodist Confirmation Service, conducted by a real Methodist Bishop, might, perhaps, appeal to rural Methodism! Or an Ordination Service, when the hands placed upon the head of the young preacher should be real Episcopal hands. Here are Mr. Bunting's words:—"The first criticism on the scheme which occurs is that the General Superintendent would be a sort of bishop *in partibus*, with no council and no see which existed for any purpose except his own superintendency. *This is a pity; but the difficulty might be remedied in time.* A bishop in council is a different thing from a bishop by himself. In effect the General Superintendent would be the Chairman of each of the Districts in his division—three bishops rolled into one." Mr. Hughes and Mr. Bunting wisely base their defence of an episcopal form of church government upon pleas of convenience and proved utility. Neither of them would pretend, nor would any Wesleyan minister, that a diocesan episcopacy is prescribed in Scripture. Mr. Wesley says that at one time he zealously espoused this theory, but became afterwards heartily ashamed of it; and writing, thirty years later, to a

brother clergyman of the Established Church, he does not hesitate to describe some of the bishops as "heathenish priests and mitred infidels." It must not be imagined that Mr. Wesley was not as keenly alive as any modern Methodist can be to the true equality which as a Christian minister he enjoyed with the highest prelate of his age. "I firmly believe," he said in 1785, "I am a Scriptural *επισκοπος* as much as any man in England or in Europe." But Mr. Wesley had too much sense to call himself a bishop, or to establish Methodism by his Deed Poll, *as he might have done*, upon an episcopal basis. I need not, however, concern myself either with the Scriptural basis of episcopacy or Mr. Wesley's ideas, for there are scores of Methodist preachers who are far better able than I am to handle this phase of the question. I look around and ask is the Episcopate of the Anglican Church so successful an engine of evangelistic enterprise as to induce Methodism to imitate it? The bishops live in lordly splendour. Hundreds of their clergy endure a scarcely-disguised poverty. Their lordly eyes are closed and their ears stopped to the most pressing social dangers of the State. In the House of Lords they are to-day, as they have ever been, the steady enemies of popular liberty, so that there exists between the Anglican episcopate and the English people a deep gulf that cannot be passed. Throughout the length and breadth of England sacerdotalism, clericalism, priestcraft are rampant in the Established Church, while the godly laity look helplessly on, unable to stop the inroad, in home, in school, in church, of the superstitious practices and beliefs of the Church of Rome. Surely, with such object lessons before us, we had better stand fast in the liberty with which God has made us free. Let us pause before we attempt to graft upon the goodly tree of Methodism a branch likely to bear such bad and bitter fruit.

#### THE THIRTEEN DIOCESES.

The full details of the new scheme have not yet been published, but sufficient information has been given by well-informed writers in the Methodist newspapers and in the

scheme as submitted in the first instance to the Committee for us to obtain a fairly accurate idea of what is suggested. The essence of the scheme is to group the existing thirty-five districts for certain purposes into thirteen larger districts, and while the present chairmen of districts will retain their title and some of their powers, their more important functions are to be transferred to the newly-appointed thirteen. For example, the duty of presiding at the two half-yearly district synods will, should Dr. Rigg's scheme be adopted, devolve upon the new Bishop, or "separated chairman."

For the convenience of any of the readers of this pamphlet who are not aware of the details of this scheme I may say that the following is the "grouping" provisionally suggested by the Committee :

1. First London and East Anglia.
2. Second London, Oxford, Portsmouth and Channel Isles.
3. Third London and Kent.
4. Devonport and Plymouth, Cornwall, Exeter.
5. Bristol, Bath, Cardiff, Swansea.
6. The two Welsh Districts.
7. Birmingham and Shrewsbury and Bedford and Northampton.
8. Liverpool and Macclesfield.
9. Manchester and Bolton.
10. Halifax and Bradford, Leeds and Sheffield.
11. Nottingham and Derby, Lincoln and Hull.
12. York, Whitby and Darlington, and Newcastle.
13. Carlisle, Isle of Man, Edinburgh and Aberdeen, and Zetland.

Bishop number Two would have to preside, for example, over the Second London Synod, then the Oxford Synod, then the Portsmouth Synod, and afterwards cross the Channel and preside at the Channel Isles Synod. Bishop number Five would have to take four Synods in succession, and Bishop Thirteen, unlucky man, would have a diocese stretching from the Isle of Man to the Zetland Isles.

For many reasons it is well carefully to study these

suggested dioceses. The scheme, be it remembered, is like certain notorious Acts of Parliament, "permissive." The Committee say to a district, "take it or leave it." It is evident, however, that all the grouped districts must be of one mind. It is no use for Cornwall to plead "give us a Bishop," if Exeter says "No." Nor, indeed, can Cornwall and Exeter get their desire, even should they agree, unless Plymouth also will welcome the new dignitary. Assume, for argument's sake, however, that the three districts agree to try the plan. Then comes the question: where is the little episcopal home to be? Is it to be Exeter, or Truro, or Plymouth? Let these districts bear in mind that they will not be at liberty to choose their Bishop. That important office is to be discharged by the Representative Conference, possibly on a Friday night, when not twenty laymen are there. When once appointed he is a fixture for six years. These are practical details.

Still more practical questions arise:

Who are the chosen thirteen to be?

How are they to be elected?

What are they to do?

Under whose authority are they to act?

To whom are they to report?

Who is to pay them?

What is to become of the thirty-five deposed Chairmen?

#### WHO ARE THE THIRTEEN TO BE?

Now, first, who are the Thirteen to be? Mr. Hughes says that they are to be "the pick of the entire Connexion," that "it was very emphatically decided by the Committee that this new office would be so important that anyone appointed to it ought to hold no other." His "whole time and energy" are to be devoted to his division. It was also "fully recognised by the Committee that it would be necessary to elect men in the prime of life, of varied gifts, and competent speech, experienced, judicious, discreet." *The Recorder* says that in addition to all this he is to be "wise, kindly, and faithful."

Applying these principles of selection it is clear that the present Chairmen of the First, Second and Third London, Birmingham, Liverpool, Manchester and Leeds Synods, all of whom hold official posts, would be disqualified. Other brethren, now filling the office of Chairmen, might be ineligible on the ground that they have passed the meridian of life. Mr. Hughes says that it is a matter of great regret that so many of our ablest ministers to-day are employed in departmental offices in such a way that they have no direct pastoral responsibility. We all agree. But how are we going to mend matters by abstracting thirteen more ministers from circuit work, and depriving them at once of any "pastoral responsibility," except over their brother ministers?

Have the promoters of this scheme considered what it means to withdraw thirteen of the most active, talented, and successful ministers of the Connexion from circuit work?

Year by year Methodism has been denuded of many of her most efficient men, so far as circuit life is concerned, in order to strengthen the departments. Is it not time that this terrible drain should cease? Never perhaps was there a time when, in the populous towns of England and in the rural districts, there was greater need for zealous, energetic Methodist ministers, able to strike out new lines of work—men not afraid of "glorious irregularity." Sad to say, matters do not stop here, for not only are the circuits to lose some of their choicest men; but the men left are to be worried by periodical episcopal visitations.

#### THE BISHOPS WILL BE CONFERENCE NOMINEES.

It is curious to note how the Thirteen are to be chosen. Evidently the first proposal made to the Committee was that the Thirteen should be elected, as at present, in the Ministerial Session of the Conference. Mr. Hughes says that the laymen objected to this, and that Dr. Rigg expressed himself willing, *as a concession*, that the separated Chairmen should be elected in the Representative Session. Mr. Hughes says that "it is a significant sign of the times that Dr. Rigg expressed himself ready to make that concession." It seems to me an



infinitely more ominous sign of the times to find Mr. Hughes calling this a "concession." For what does it mean? The bishops are to be endowed with new disciplinary powers in the Church, especially over their brother ministers. What voice are the 1,602 to have in the election of the Thirteen? This, and this alone, that once in six years 240 ministers are to unite with 240 laymen in selecting the thirteen bishops. But how are the 240 ministers selected? Take last year as a typical year. Only 135 ministers were elected by the District Synods to attend the Representative Conference; all the other ministers were either officials, members of the Legal Hundred, Chairmen of Districts, or members nominated by the departments.

I venture, however, to press this point farther, and to take a concrete case. Let us assume that the scheme had been adopted, and that at last year's Conference the bishop for the Plymouth, Cornwall, and Exeter Districts had been proposed in the Representative Session for election. How many ministers chosen by these Districts to represent the views of their brethren in the ministry would have had a voice in this important matter? Nine only, and even this assumes that they would all be present in the Conference when the election took place. That is to say, an episcopal officer might at the Cardiff Conference have been imposed on these three Districts for six years, and only nine ministers, who happened to have seats in the Conference last year as elected representatives from those Districts, would have been able to choose their own bishop. It is, I think, only necessary to state such a fact as this, and to apply it to other Districts, to demonstrate the absurdity and the gross injustice of the scheme. The Conference might select a bishop for the First London and East Anglia Districts, and choose a man opposed by every one of the ten ministers who, as elected representatives of those Districts, would have a voice in the election. It is manifest that the choice of the episcopate would rest in the hands of official and departmental Methodism were such a scheme adopted. The only fair and reasonable method would be to place the power of election in the hands of all ministers

and laymen attending the District Synods concerned, and let the election be an annual one. I do not for one moment advocate such a scheme, but I say it is the only just method of election, should this unfortunate project ever be sanctioned.

#### WHAT ARE THE BISHOPS TO DO?

What are the Thirteen to do? There is a singular vagueness at present on this point. Mr. Hughes, dimly conscious of some opposition, says, "take the line of least resistance—don't give the chairman a single particle of power beyond what he enjoys to-day." *The Recorder*, on the other hand, says that he is to be at liberty to go into dependent circuits as well as solitary stations, but that he is not to be expected to preside over District Sub-Committees. Both journals assume that the new district officials will sit in the Stationing Committee, and, I suppose, in the Conference.

It is not difficult to see that the Thirteen thus armed for six years with power of disposing of the ecclesiastical patronage of our church, possessing seats for a like period in the two branches of the Conference, enjoying, as many of them would, legal rights hitherto unenforced as members of the Legal Hundred, would either alone, or in conjunction with the ex-Presidents and the heads of Methodist Departments, become that "permanent central council" of ministers, those "chiefs in council" the "captains," foreshadowed five years ago by Dr. Rigg in that startling speech at Camborne, which some of us so well remember. They would be a "caste," a select ring, *not* a "ring of life."

It is no part of my province in this brief review to discuss the new relationship which will be established between the bishops and, *firstly*, the deposed Thirty-five, *secondly*, the superintendents in his diocese, and *thirdly*, the circuit Quarterly Meetings. That each relationship will be a somewhat delicate one, no one doubts. One very significant commentary upon *The Recorder's* eulogy has already appeared in a later number of that journal. The writer in *The Recorder*, good, simple soul, not having perhaps for some years travelled in a circuit, dwelling upon the excellences of the new idea,



said: "Frequently it would be his (the new Chairman's) pleasure to call his brethren in the ministry and the laymen of his Districts together for conference on the work of God, and for prayer and for spiritual refreshment." But that is not how it strikes an active circuit minister, for a fortnight later the Rev. W. G. Hall writes as follows, "Any post might bring a letter to a superintendent to this effect: 'Dear Brother, I propose on Tuesday morning to visit your circuit and take counsel with you as to the condition of things generally (see *Minutes of Conference*, 1895, page 97). Please have all your books ready for inspection, and kindly request the officials of the several societies in your circuits to meet me.'" Whereupon *The Recorder* sagely observes: "It is quite true, as Mr. Hall says, that the whole subject requires most careful consideration." Mr. Hughes does not take Mr. Hall's telling shot so meekly. Mr. Hall's attack is dangerous; and why so? Because, says Mr. Hughes, "it appeals to the deepest, the strongest, and the most characteristic passion of unregenerate human nature—the dislike of authority." And with a view to encourage other superintendents not to use such rash language as energetic Mr. Hall, Mr. Hughes asks: "Is it not conceivable that some superintendents might be greatly benefited if they were under authority?" This is an aspect of the controversy which laymen can confidently leave in the talented hands of men like Mr. Hall. It is, however, a sample of the "spiritual refreshment" which an energetic bishop can and will supply.

What is to happen to the existing chairmen? They are, we are told, to retain office, and to be called vice-chairmen. We are not at present informed what their relations are to be towards their new superior officer? Nor is it clear what they are to do? Are they to retain their power jointly with their superior officer of visiting solitary stations, of acting in cases of discipline, of sitting in the ministerial and representative sessions of Conference?

#### AN IRRESPONSIBLE "ORDER."

Nor is it unimportant to inquire under whose instructions

these new functionaries will act. Who will be responsible to the Methodist Church for the due and efficient discharge of their duties? and who will pay them their stipends?

One of the guarantees which the Methodist Church enjoys for the efficient discharge of the duties of its clergy is that ministers holding official positions in the various departments are brought into frequent contact with their Departmental Committees of ministers and laymen, under whose control they in a sense work.

In the Circuits ministers and laymen exercise in the Quarterly Meeting some control and oversight of their clergy. Even Chairmen of Districts are now subject to this sway, happily a mild and harmonious one.

The new order will have to obey nobody but the Conference; and here I ask, which session of Conference? The only control which the laity will possess over their new Bishops will be once in six years, when they may, in conjunction with the ministers, re-elect them or not.

Chairmen of Districts are now subject to annual election. The new order is to be chosen for terms of six years. They may prove dismal failures, or mischievous firebrands. They may develop ritualistic tendencies. They may become ardent politicians. They may insist upon delivering fierce diocesan charges. Whatever they are, or do, they are irremovable for six years, so long as they keep within the four walls of their instructions.

The astonishing thing is that the very men who propose to rivet this episcopal chain upon the Methodist Church for six years, are the men who most resolutely opposed (and here I, of course, except Mr. Hughes) the permissive power, which so many Districts asked for their Circuits, of inviting their ministers for an extended ministerial term of six years. Circuits are not allowed the liberty of inviting their ministers for more than three years. The new order is to be firmly established for six, and, as I have previously shown, may be imposed on a District with the assent of a mere handful of the ministers in that District, or even in opposition to their wishes.

## THE MONEY COST.

I now come to the important question, "What is all this to cost?"

Mr. Hughes says £8 per circuit per annum, which, spread over the 798 circuits, would amount to £6,384 per annum. *The Recorder* points out very properly that to this would have to be added "travelling and purely Home Missionary expenses."

Neither journal refers to the initial outlay involved in furnishing thirteen houses. This would mean £5,000.

It is evident, that to the total sum of £500 a year, which each Chairmen would cost, certain exceptional expenses would have to be added. Our Third London "Bishop" could not be expected to make an occasional pastoral visitation to the Channel Islands, nor could the Cornish Bishop very well traverse his wide diocese, without very considerable expenditure. The Northern Bishop, number Thirteen, to-day in the Isle of Man, to-morrow in the Orkneys, one month in Aberdeen, the next in Carlisle, would find his railway fares and hotel bills rather a heavy item. I think I should not be far wrong in saying that the total annual outlay which this scheme would involve, would be more like £700 per man than £500, or, in other words, £9,100 per annum. Whichever figure we take, either the Committee's figure of £6,384 per annum, or mine of £9,100—and capitalising this amount on a four per cent. basis, we arrive at a capital sum of £159,600 in the one case, or £227,500 in the other, as the cost to Methodism of this proposal.

There is no escape from these figures. If the Committee are going to impose an annual charge of £6,000 or £9,000 upon the Methodist Church, that is equivalent to raising such a principal sum as that I name. Take the capital sum as midway between the Committee's estimate and mine, then we arrive at a figure of £190,000. This is what the Methodist Church is asked to pay, now and hereafter, for its new Bench of Bishops. The Methodist people will not so utterly lose their senses.

It is not surprising to find the suggestion made that this new Connexional fund should be raised either by a circuit assessment or an annual collection. These are the two ways by which alone an unpopular fund can be raised in Methodism. Quarterly meetings pay an "assessment" without very seriously debating the destination of the levy. A worshipper drops his shilling, or his copper, into the plate without severely weighing the object. Not so with a fund sustained by annual subscriptions or donations. There the application of the money is more rigidly scrutinised. Another practical difficulty here presents itself. Assume the new scheme to be adopted in the First London District, and rejected in the Second, upon whom is the cost of the new official to be thrown? Manifestly upon the District that wants him, so that the assessment, or levy, or collection must be, in all fairness, confined to the District that desires the Bishop.

#### METHODIST TAXATION.

Whatever method Conference may suggest of meeting this new Connexional outlay—which, by the way, will produce no new income—probably no more unfortunate time than the present one could have been chosen to impose this financial burden upon the Methodist Church. The terrible monetary losses of recent years have fallen in no small degree upon the middle and lower classes. Building societies, mortgage securities, railway investments—whatever the class of property that may have been selected by the thrifty tradesman or artisan may be—one hears the same story of depreciation and loss. Simultaneously there has been unusual trade depression. All this tells severely upon a church which is essentially the church of the middle and lower classes. Side by side with these commercial losses and trade depression, new religious enterprises have been undertaken which have taxed heavily the resources of our generous church. Men do not like to feel that directly they enter Methodism they become a taxable religious commodity, subject to assessments and levies at the sweet will of the Conference.

Assume, however, for a moment that with a view to strengthening its District administration, and extending and consolidating Methodism in any given county, the District Synod is prepared to provide a sum equal to £8 per circuit, then, I ask, "Is the plan suggested by the Committee the best and the most economical one?" I say decidedly it is not. Take, for example, the Birmingham District with its forty-four circuits, or the Liverpool District with its forty-one circuits. £8 per circuit would in the one case represent £352 per annum, and in the other case £328. In either case the amount would suffice to give the Chairman and the Financial Secretary of each District an efficient clerical helper, and a first-rate lay assistant secretary each at a salary of £150 a year.

A lay secretary or clerk in each of our large Districts would be invaluable. The Chairman and especially the Financial Secretary are at present overwhelmed with a mass of secular clerical work which a layman would more properly discharge.

Apart from every other consideration, the new scheme must break down upon financial grounds. It will involve a cruel assessment upon dependent and poor circuits, while rich ones will resent being taxed to maintain an ecclesiastical official whose interference would never be sought in their circuit administration.

#### NOT BISHOPS BUT "PRESIDING ELDERS."

In order to reconcile us to the new clerical order, it is said in some quarters that the Separated Chairmen will in no sense be "bishops," but will rather correspond to the "presiding elders" of the Methodist Episcopal Church. I have before me the yearly estimate of outlay in connection with a prosperous Methodist Church in the State of Illinois, upon which I see an annual "levy" of 180 dollars, or about £36, for the "elder." Mr. Hughes seems to think that it is impossible to pay too much for such dignitaries. Whatever may be the value of the "presiding elder" in the United States, and I do not for one moment desire to underrate his importance, Dr. Rigg has, I think,

most conclusively shown in his admirable work on church organisation that such an officer could not be tolerated in British Methodism. Speaking of the Methodist Episcopal Church of America, Dr. Rigg says: "In its church organisation and government it stands apart from all other Churches. . . . It offers strong contrasts to the Wesleyan Methodism in England. In the spirit and character of its government and administration it is far less popular, far more clerical. . . . It has more alliance with the administrative genius of the Church of England than has English Methodism" (1891 ed., p. 263). "In America the English superintendent developed into a 'presiding elder' with his 'District'; his subordinate colleagues being appointed to work under his direction in circuits and stations." "He was distinguished as the 'presiding elder,' and he exercised a powerful and peremptory sway over his province" (p. 267). "The 'presiding elder,' a sort of diocesan under-bishop, itinerates through the whole of his District. The resident minister in each of the stations which the presiding elder visits is a comparatively insignificant person." Dr. Rigg quotes an important extract from the well-known *Discipline* of the American Episcopal Church to show that "the authority of the presiding elder absorbs—we should, perhaps, better say effaces—all such ministerial authority on the part of the ministers stationed within his district as according to English Methodism would belong in connection with each quarterly meeting, and the constituent societies, to the resident superintendent minister and his colleagues" (Dr. Rigg: *Church Organisation*, p. 269). And yet when respected English superintendents like the Rev. W. G. Hall and Mr. Ingram protest against being placed under such officials, Mr. Hughes tells them that they possess "episcopal authority in the extremest form" themselves, and mildly suggests that it would be a good thing for them if they were subjected to a more stringent rule. The men who know American Methodism best are strongest in their conviction that British Methodism has little to learn in her Church institutions from our friends across the water. Our Church institutions are more democratic and less oligarchical; they



more frankly acknowledge the rights of the laity ; they accord to the leader and the lay preacher a Church status and authority which in the States is not enjoyed ; and the lowliest member of the British Methodist Church possesses " certain inalienable rights " of ecclesiastical " life and liberty " which American citizens have not, thus far, managed to graft upon American Methodism.

#### GOOD-BYE TO METHODIST UNION.

I pass from the rather awkward analogy of " presiding elders " to submit one more plea against the new prelacy. How is it that Mr. Hughes' eyes are so blinded that he cannot see that his clerical body—call them what you will, " bishops," " presiding elders," " separated chairmen," " divisional superintendents," or even " archdeacons"—will in reality and effect constitute a new caste and sacerdotal order, which will not only prove an insuperable barrier between Wesleyan Methodism and the Free Churches of Methodism, but will draw the Wesleyan Church into closer contact with the Church of England, and alienate her from Nonconformity? If this scheme be adopted we may say good-bye to Methodist re-union. Does any intelligent student of the religious usages and principles of Primitive, or Free, or New Connexion Methodism dream for one moment that those religious bodies would tolerate the new order which some of the ministerial leaders of Wesleyan Methodism advocate with such extraordinary fatuity and such amazing zeal? It is idle to say that the accomplished ministers and laity of those Churches are wrong, that they do not know what is best for their Church life, that they have too little clerical authority, and too much equality of the ministry and the laity. On these points the leaders of those energetic and successful Churches think for themselves, and they pay very little heed to the fulminations of *The Methodist Times* or the kindly counsels of *The Recorder*.

#### THE OBJECTIONS RESTATED.

Earlier in this pamphlet I ventured briefly to summarize

the objections to the mode in which the episcopate scheme has been launched upon the Methodist community. I may now perhaps be permitted to present in a similarly condensed form the objections to the plan on its merits as I have endeavoured to portray them.

1. Episcopacy is repugnant to the spirit of Methodism, and subversive of the rights of ministers and laymen.

2. The withdrawal of thirteen "picked men" from the ranks of the itinerant ministers is a drain which the circuits cannot reasonably bear.

3. It will be impossible to confer upon the new order sufficient duties and powers to keep them employed without bringing them seriously into conflict with the existing Chairmen, Superintendents of Circuits, and Quarterly Meetings.

4. The thirteen bishops will be under no effective control, nor can any guarantees be provided for the proper discharge of their duties.

5. They will be the nominees of the Conference.

6. The scheme will cost a sum which Methodism cannot afford.

7. The creation of a Bench of Wesleyan Bishops will alienate the Wesleyan Church from Nonconformity, and render Methodist union impossible.

#### WHY AGITATE METHODISM?

With these considerations before me, I ask Dr. Rigg, Dr. Stephenson, and Mr. Hughes—the powerful and respected triumvirate to whom Wesleyan Methodism owes so much—is it worth while to plunge our Church into an agitation, which must be long, I fear bitter, and which can have but one end? The controversy must be carried into every Synod, into every Methodist Council, into each Quarterly Meeting, into every Lay Preachers' meeting. Will the result, even if Bishops are authorised, justify such a conflict? "I am sick at heart," says one of our oldest, most eloquent, and most laborious itinerant preachers, "with these never ending attempts to change our ecclesiastical polity, and thus



practically divert the attention of both ministers and people from better things. These things have no charm to me ; very few of them, I am afraid, are ' born from above.' They seem rather the outcome and product of an unrestful and somewhat ambitious ecclesiasticism."

The tendency of the age at home and abroad, in every phase of public life, is to curtail ecclesiastical power in secular affairs. In Parliament we are trying to rescue rural England from the withering dominion of the Anglican clergy. The more thoughtful laity of the English Church are quietly preparing for the coming struggle with sacerdotalism, of which the Established Church must shortly become the arena. Methodism herself is not untainted by the foul breath of priestcraft. Signs are not wanting, even within her sanctuary, of the powerful undercurrent of revolt against ecclesiastical power. The rapid growth in number and popularity of the annual assembly of Methodist Lay Preachers ; the newly-formed Methodist Councils ; the quiet distrust of exclusive clerical control of Methodist literature and its press ; the institution of an order of Lay Evangelists—these are all omens and portents.

It has been through the development of such movements as that now proposed, that hierarchies, with all their evils, have been fastened upon churches. The glory of Methodism is the inspired personality of the agents whom God has used in every walk of life, of every grade of intellect, for the spread of scriptural holiness through the land. In this democratic age when the citizens of our nation, taught by the Nonconforming Churches to comprehend their political and social rights, are quick to exercise them, we must not see a church, which boasts that she is the church of the common people, assume the intolerable burdens of episcopacy.

CHISLEHURST, *6th Jan., 1894.*